FILES MANAGEMENT

Files management is the process of determining how files will be arranged, categorized, accessed, and stored. Efficient electronic filing practices ensure that the right file can be retrieved expeditiously at the right time for the lowest possible cost. Establishing a well-organized filing system involves detailed planning and designing to ensure productive workflow. This includes deciding how files will be arranged and accessed over time, creating classification systems, and selecting the proper format and media.

Electronic Files Management

File naming is an important part of any records management program. A file name is the principal identifier for a record. Especially when dealing with electronic records, it is important to have a unified naming system so that records can be placed in context with other records and series as well as proper state and local Records Retention and Disposition Schedules. Records that are named using a consistent, logical system can be more easily located and shared among users. It is important to create an agencywide file-naming procedure to accompany an electronic records management policy.

In developing a file-naming procedure, include some of the following familiar components:

- Version number (e.g., version 2 [v2, vers2])
- Date of creation (e.g., March 4, 2008 [030408, 03_04_08])
- Name of creator (e.g., Robert B. Pattinson [rbpattinson, rbp])
- Description of content (e.g., media kit [medkit, mk])
- Name of intended audience (e.g., general public [pub])
- Name of group associated with the record (e.g., Committee ABC [commabc])
- Release date (e.g., released on May 13, 2007 at 9:00 ᴀᴍ central time [51307_0900ct])
- Publication date (e.g., published on April 24, 2006 [pub042406])
- Project number (e.g., project number 888 [PN888])
- Department number (e.g., Department 110 [dept110])
- Records series (e.g., SeriesX)

Numbers are often used to differentiate similar documents. When numbering documents, use numbering in combination with descriptive names to make file content and purpose clear. Also be sure to use "0"s as placeholders. A sort by name of the following filing names—

"committeereport1," "committeereport2," "committeereport10," "committeereport27," and "committeereport103"—would return the following order:

> committeereport1
> committeereport10
> committeereport103
> committeereport2
> committeereport27

Whereas using "0"s as placeholders would result in the following order:

> committeereport001
> committeereport002
> committeereport010
> committeereport027
> committeereport103

Also keep the following in mind while developing a file-naming policy:

- *Access and ease of use*. Since the purpose of file naming is to facilitate use and access, a file-naming policy should also be straightforward and simple.
- *Scalability*. Think about the number of files or file versions needed when determining a naming policy. If a particular group of records grows quickly, do not limit numerical placeholders to two spaces, or only 99 records may be created within the group.
- *Uniqueness*. Name files so that they have unique names regardless of their location. A file entitled "letter_0608" is not independent of location since this letter could pertain to a myriad of record series. Unique names will enable users to avoid the problem of files with the same name causing confusion when they end up in the same storage folder.
- *Universality*. File names should be comprehensible and should make sense to users, not just the person who created the file. Having a common classification scheme, or taxonomy, between users is essential. The benefits of standardization can be recognized when combining multiple users' files and when integrating different types of electronic records, such as Web, database or word processing files.
- *Version control*. Determine how to manage different versions of the record. Some organizations include a version number in the file name, as shown above. Current and obsolete files with the same name become a problem when these files are transferred to a common storage folder, for example.